

Neoliberal epidemics and the politics of evidence

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The recent book *How Politics Makes Us Sick* introduces the concept of neoliberal epidemics. This workshop, structured to be provocative and provide ample opportunity for interaction, will explore the politics of evidence in the context of such epidemics.

Ted Schrecker (Durham University; co-author of the book and moderator of the workshop) will argue that instead of the conventional wisdom that 'more evidence' is needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of population-level interventions to address social determinants of health, the guiding principle in this age of endemic insecurity and selective austerity should be 'first, do no harm'.

Privatisation, a key element in the neoliberal agenda, has been justified by claims about both efficiency and quality. David Byrne (Durham University) will argue that the supporting evidence is weak, often non-existent. Claims about markets as promoters of efficiency ignore both transaction costs and imperfect competition. Claims that bigger means better, with restructuring often involving service reduction and shifts to the private sector, are specious.

What happens to children in their earliest years determines the distribution of key outcomes in adult life. David Taylor-Robinson (University of Liverpool) will argue that the benefits of investing in the early years are well demonstrated, yet changes to the welfare system in the UK have disproportionately reduced the income of the most disadvantaged families. His explanation of the threat to public health draws on research for *Due North: The report of the Inquiry on Health Equity for the North*.

Kate Pickett (University of York and Equality Trust) will address the failure of neoliberal economic ideology and policy to deliver wellbeing in a global frame of reference, using the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals agreed in September 2015 to present the evidence base for a new paradigm for economic and development policy.